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SUBJECT: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) With the start of the Ukrainian Presidential campaign, opposition leader Viktor Yanukovych and Prime Minister Tymoshenko are clearly in the lead to enter the second round. Arseniy Yatsenyuk remains the lone second-tier candidate in the race, although his slumping poll numbers, down more than a third since early summer, make a late surge to challenge the front runners less likely. Six third-tier candidates have little chance; many will seek to extract concessions from the first-round winners for the support of their constituencies in the second round. Most notable of the third-tier candidates is President Yushchenko, whose support has collapsed since his victory in 2004 from 52 percent to around three percent. End Summary.

OFFICIAL KICK-OFF

¶2. (SBU) Candidate registration began on October 19, the last day to register is November 6, and official campaigning cannot begin until the Central Election Commission completes a candidate's registration process, which takes about five days. Unofficially, candidates have been campaigning since summer with advertisements and rallies. The first round of the presidential election takes place on January 17, to be followed by a second round if, as appears likely, no candidate gets more than fifty percent.

VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH: "PROBLEMS WILL BE SOLVED"

¶3. (SBU) Opposition leader and Party of Regions head Viktor Yanukovych served as Prime Minister from 2002-04 under former President Kuchma and from 2006-07 under President Yushchenko. He is currently polling in first place at 28 percent of likely voters, according to local reliable pollster SOCIS. Yanukovych is widely expected to win the first round of voting, but could find it challenging to win a majority in the second due to the widespread perception that he would do Moscow's bidding, and voters' memory of his campaign's attempt to falsify the 2004 presidential election.

¶4. (C) Yanukovych supports a close relationship with Moscow and is the most pro-Russian of the major candidates. Yanukovych calls for abandoning Ukraine's efforts to join NATO, though his advisors caution that a Yanukovych presidency would not end cooperation with the Alliance. Yanukovych does not emphasize Ukraine's integration with the European Union, but has not come out against seeking eventual membership. In August 2008, Yanukovych publicly supported recognition of the "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and, although criticized even from some within the Party of Regions, has not recanted. He advocates partial Russian control of Ukraine's natural gas pipeline infrastructure through a joint consortium, and joining a

customs union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. On the domestic front he is pushing legislation that would immediately raise social welfare payments, pensions and the minimum wage as a key part of his election strategy.

¶ 5. (C) Yanukovych's pre-campaign slogan has been "He wants to hear what you think" and urges voters to call Regions-sponsored phone banks to register their views. His newest advertisements are emblazoned with the words "Problems will be solved" in bold letters beneath a photo of an apparently botox-enhanced Yanukovych. The advertisements also urge voters to contact Regions with their concerns.

YULIYA TYMOSHENKO: "THEY BLOCK, BUT SHE WORKS"

¶ 6. (C) Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, in office since 2007, previously served in the same post in 2005. She heads the second-largest parliamentary faction, which bears her name, and is currently polling in second place at 19 percent.

She is by far the strongest challenger to Yanukovych, especially if she can unite the fractured pro-Western forces in Central and Western Ukraine behind her in the second round of voting. While she trails Yanukovych in the polls, many Ukrainian political analysts believe her unmatched skills as a campaigner will give her the edge in the end. The other key variable is the economy. As Prime Minister, Tymoshenko's popularity has suffered during the economic crisis. She is now slowly bouncing back. If the economy starts to rebound -- or at least avoids a "second wave" of crisis -- her chances will rise.

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¶ 7. (C) Tymoshenko promises to improve relations with Moscow through pragmatic engagement. However, she has pledged to continue to pursue European integration vigorously and has declared that Ukraine has one fundamental vector: Europe. She has underlined her commitment to a Western-oriented Ukraine, but with a mostly European focus that soft-pedals NATO. Tymoshenko's domestic economic agenda is often contradictory, at times supporting free-market solutions and at other times reverting to government control of prices and heavy regulation. She is campaigning as the candidate who can get things done -- and as the one who represents/embodies the Ukrainian nation.

¶ 8. (SBU) Tymoshenko's extensive pre-election poster and television campaign featured variations on the theme of "They Block, She Works", meaning the Party of Regions and others block the efforts of the government, but she continues to work for the country. The advertisements have no picture of Tymoshenko, nor do they carry her name, referring only to "She" in her party's signature red-and-white-color motif. Tymoshenko has also assembled an A-list cast of Ukraine's most famous movie, television, and music personalities for a series of nationwide shows that do not explicitly refer to her candidacy, but highlight her accomplishments as Prime Minister. Actors and musicians are also featured in a poster campaign about their love for their country, again without mentioning Tymoshenko by name, but in her signature colors and with the heart symbol used by her party. Tymoshenko's campaign posters have been only in the Ukrainian language, even in Crimea (unlike those of Yanukovych and Yatsenyuk which use Russian in the South and East.)

ARSENIY YATSENYUK: "TO SAVE THE COUNTRY"

¶ 9. (SBU) Rada MP Arseniy Yatsenyuk, leader of the Front of Change political organization, is currently the only other candidate with a chance to reach the second round of the presidential election. He served as Rada Speaker from 2007-08, Foreign Minister in 2007, and as the Minister of

Economy from 2005-06. He is currently polling at 8.2 percent, a significant drop from his 13.1 percent rating early this summer.

¶10. (C) Despite initially positioning himself as the heir to Yushchenko's Euro-Atlantic policies, Yatsenyuk is now advocating for a return to former President Kuchma's "multi-vector" foreign policy that sought a non-aligned status for Ukraine that balanced between Russia and Europe. His aides have warned us to expect more pro-Russian rhetoric from Yatsenyuk, designed to appeal to voters in the East and South. In a recent speech Yatsenyuk said that the only difference between the U.S., Europe and Russia is that the West "smiles" as it uses Ukraine for its own interests. He is campaigning for increased spending on social welfare programs, agriculture and the military. Yatsenyuk has called for a return to the strong presidential system under Kuchma.

¶11. (C) Yatsenyuk has had an extensive pre-campaign presence, with billboards and a multitude of para-military style tents where paid campaign workers hand out campaign materials. Yatsenyuk has attempted to portray himself, so far unsuccessfully, as a savior of Ukraine with his slogan "To Save the Country." Yatsenyuk has asserted that the upcoming presidential election is Ukraine's "last chance" for democracy, and has indicated that his campaign's "unhappy" colors, a camouflage theme, are intended to convey that the country is on the verge of destruction. Yatsenyuk told Western diplomats in early summer that if he failed to enter the second round, he was willing to make a deal for his endorsement with either Tymoshenko or Yanukovych. Politics, he said, is about getting the best deal you can.

PETRO SYMONENKO: "A UNITED LEFT"

¶12. (SBU) Petro Symonenko has headed the Ukrainian Communist Party since 1993 and has been a Rada MP since 1990. He is currently polling at 3.6 percent, his support in terminal decline from his 1999 campaign when he went head-to-head with former President Leonid Kuchma in the second round and garnered 37.8 percent of the vote. Symonenko is the only presidential candidate who promises to abolish the presidency in favor of a full parliamentary system. Symonenko has gained the backing of a number of small parties on the left and is negotiating with the Socialist party to be their official candidate too. With virtually no chance to win the election, Symonenko will be looking to Yanukovych for handouts in return for the Left's endorsement in the second

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round.

¶13. (SBU) Symonenko favors closer ties with Moscow, including a joint customs union, and promises to stop all integration and cooperation with NATO. Symonenko advocates returning privatized companies to state hands and heavy government control of the economy and prices. He created a stir earlier this year by divorcing his wife and marrying a woman 30 years his junior, who had just given birth to his daughter. Symonenko has been invisible as a candidate in the pre-election blitz.

VOLODYMYR LYTVYN: BALANCE AND PROFESSIONALISM

¶14. (SBU) Volodymyr Lytvyn, Speaker of Parliament since 2008, previously served as Speaker from 2002-06 and as Chief of Staff to Kuchma from 1999-2002. He leads the Lytvyn Bloc, the smallest faction in the Rada, and is polling at about 2.9 percent. Lytvyn calls for improved relations with Moscow, and argues Ukraine should "temporarily" abandon efforts to join NATO and the EU in order to focus on domestic development. He is a supporter of a "multi-vector" foreign policy that balances between East and West. Lytvyn's agenda

is primarily focused on domestic policies, like raising welfare and pension payments and increasing government support for agriculture.

¶15. (SBU) Lytvyn's pre-election efforts have been limited to a listening tour of oblast capitals, where he promises audiences that, as President, he will restore professionalism to government. Lytvyn's intentions for the second round are unclear because, although he is a member of the coalition with Tymoshenko, he recently defied the coalition and voted with Yanukovych to pass legislation that raised social payments.

VIKTOR YUSHCHENKO: REMEMBER ME?

¶16. (SBU) President Viktor Yushchenko assumed office in 2005 after the mass demonstrations of the Orange Revolution. He previously served as Prime Minister from 1999-2001 and as head of the National Bank from 1993-99. Yushchenko is currently polling at 2.8 percent, down from the 52 percent he garnered in his 2004 victory over Yanukovych in the re-run second round of the presidential election.

¶17. (C) Yushchenko is the only major candidate pushing for expeditious EU and NATO membership, viewing full Euro-Atlantic integration as the only counterweight to Russian influence in Ukraine. He supports many liberal market reforms, but has been ineffectual in his first term at ensuring their passage or implementation. Yushchenko has called for increased measures to fight corruption and graft, but his declarations, in this and other areas, have not been matched by results.

¶18. (C) Yushchenko's pre-election rhetoric has thus far focused on nationalist themes, such as the need for more military spending, and condemning what he regards as the Tymoshenko government's incompetence in the economic sphere. He is also trying to remind voters of the positive changes in Ukrainian society, such as enhanced freedom of speech and media, that happened during his term. Yushchenko did not have a visible pre-election advertising campaign. A leader in Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party has told us Yushchenko would likely drop out of the race before the first round.

SERHIY TIHIPKO: "A STRONG PRESIDENT, A STRONG UKRAINE"

¶19. (SBU) Serhiy Tihipko, a successful Ukrainian banker, previously served as head of the National Bank from 2002-04, Minister of Economy from 1999-2000, and as Vice Prime Minister for Economic Affairs in 1997. Tihipko also served as Yanukovych's campaign manager in the 2004 presidential election. He is currently polling at 2.6 percent, although his trend is upward. Tihipko advocates returning Ukraine to a strong presidential system of government, and is focusing his campaign on economic development. He promises to stabilize the economy, increase business investment, and reduce corruption. He kicked off his presidential bid with the release of his book outlining his plan for Ukraine's economic development.

¶20. (SBU) Tihipko has engaged in a massive pre-election campaign advertising blitz. His posters, some as big as those in Times Square, are ubiquitous across the country. In addition to advertising his new book, his posters (in an apparent violation of rules against early campaigning)

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declare "A Strong President, A Strong Country."

ANATOLIY HRYTSENKO: "FOR CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER"

¶21. (C) Anatoliy Hrytsenko, Defense Minister from 2005-07

and head of the respected Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank is polling around one percent. He is the election's national-security candidate and is also pushing his vision for a new Ukrainian constitution that would restore a strong presidential system. Hrytsenko promises to restore order to the Ukrainian political system and to support Western integration. He has had few advertisements during the pre-election campaign and has struggled to fund his campaign after publicly promising not to take money from oligarchs. As a supporter of Euro-Atlantic integration, he would back Tymoshenko or no one in a Tymoshenko-Yanukovych second round match up. Deputy PM Nemyria told us that, in return for supporting Tymoshenko in the second round, Hrytsenko could get the nod as Defense Minister.

OLEH TIAHNYBOK: GOD AND COUNTRY

¶22. (SBU) Oleh Tiahnybok heads the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) Party and currently polls around one percent. Svoboda's star has been on the rise after winning regional elections in Ternopil Oblast this spring. Tiahnybok is trying to take advantage of the political vacuum in Western Ukraine left by the collapse of Yushchenko's popularity. Originally a leader of the far-right, he has moderated his message somewhat in recent years by focusing on more broadly palatable -- at least in Western Ukraine -- nationalist themes. Tiahnybok has had a limited pre-election presence, with messages to support the Ukrainian language and culture. He said that Ukraine's current political establishment will face God's wrath for their corruption and willingness to embrace Moscow.

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